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# Modern Philology

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## SHAKESPEARE AND DUCIS

### I

In discussing the adaptations of Shakespeare made by Jean-François Ducis for the last generation of the old régime, my object will be twofold. I wish to show in some detail the changes in Shakespeare demanded by French taste at that time; and to demonstrate how Ducis represented in a rather logical and interesting manner a certain point in the evolution of the classical tragedy.

These were the first versions of Shakespeare to be performed on the French stage. They were decidedly popular. They came just at the time (1769-92) when new currents of *sensibilité*, humanitarianism, Anglomania, and iconoclasm were the strongest things in French literature. Ducis illustrates admirably the first three of these phases; but neither he nor any other dramatist could illustrate the fourth, for the reason that the stage was the last thing to be touched by the coming Revolution.

The course of tragedy since the days of Racine had been marked by a sure, if spasmodic, decline. Crébillon *père*, the admired of Poe, has been credited with dealing the first mortal blow to the *genre*.<sup>1</sup> I shall return to him in a moment. But Voltaire, for good or for evil, is by far the most consequential representative of what for convenience we may call the neo-classic tragedy. He was in the main a devout Racinian. He was as much of a conservative in the drama as he was a radical in philosophy. He held by the unities, by the

<sup>1</sup> In *Atrée et Thyeste*, 1707, and a preface to this. See Lanson, *Nivelle de la Chaussée et la comédie larmoyante*, Paris, 1887, pp. 102-4.

dignity and harmony of language, by the exhibition of strongly centered action and passion, by the use of a mannered artistry to import the one principal novelty that he considered possible after the wide exploitation of the great masters. Yet he was forced to certain relaxations of his doctrine, not only, perhaps, through the public expectations aroused by his controversy with La Motte Houdar, but mainly through his interest in those very plays of Shakespeare whose introduction to the reading public he first forwarded and then deplored as dangerous.<sup>1</sup> It will be found that his hesitations and variations are chiefly about rather minor matters. No surer sign of the failing of the genuine *vis tragica* than that most of the dramatic discussion in those days was about "rules" first and incidental technique afterward. Would it not be permissible, asks Voltaire, to give, as the English do, the names of "real" kings and queens? The stage must not be a "lieu de carnage"—but could he not be allowed to show a little blood on Caesar's robe? Might not the unity of place include a rather extensible place? What is the matter with taking subjects from mediaeval and oriental history? And, more importantly, what about the introduction of heart-interest?<sup>2</sup>

In his own plays he has answered these questions with varying degrees of assurance; and several of his compromises seemed good to his contemporaries, particularly to Ducis. He visited the East<sup>3</sup> in *Zaïre* and *Mahomet*; in *La Mort de César*, Antony makes his speech over a blood-besprinkled corpse; in *Brutus*, slight shifts of scene are maneuvered between the outside and the inside of the consul's house; in this play and in *Œdipe* a heart-interest is dragged in by force, whereas *La Mort de César* is stripped bare of feminine rôles. *Zaïre* has a touch of Crébillon's trickery in the fraternal relationship (unknown to the heroine's lover) which exists between Zaïre and Nérestan. In none of these plays, whether imitated from Shakespeare or not, do we find the scorned "multiplicity of interest," the broken and realistic language of crowds, or any mixture of kinds.<sup>4</sup> As to

<sup>1</sup> See Lounsbury, *Shakespeare and Voltaire*, New York, 1902.

<sup>2</sup> These views will be found for the most part in the *Préface d'Œdipe* and the *Discours sur la tragédie*.

<sup>3</sup> Ducis followed him there in *Abufar*; but by that time the Orient had won again for *littérati* its old position as the home of the *romanesque* and the apologue.

<sup>4</sup> Such as, deriving from Shakespeare, produced later Hugo's theory of the grotesque.

expression, the fortress is still held in the name of dignity and *éloquence*; but save in the best purple patches there is more than a tendency for the *éloquence* to become rhetoric. In Crébillon and Ducis it became that pulseless unrelated rhetoric which substitutes characterless verbiage for the psychology of Racine, *simplex munditiis*. When to this have been added, as cross-currents from the *comédie larmoyante*, increasing streams of philanthropic and domestic tears, one may even now ask whether the point in tragedy attained by Ducis was not the *nadir*.

That distinction, it is true, is claimed for Crébillon himself by Brunetière: Crébillon is either altogether outside of tragedy or he is its forlorn hope, its "phantom."<sup>1</sup> Without dwelling on this peculiar dramatist, it may be shown in what respects his technique paved the way for Ducis. Crébillon stands for the use of such horrors as parricide and incest, in a way to keep their effect for the imagination while mitigating it in fact. In the past, they are told of in *récit*. In the action itself, they threaten rather than occur; and when parricide (in the more general French sense) does occur the absolute monstrous is avoided by a liberal use of incognito.<sup>2</sup> Oreste kills his relatives unwittingly; Pharasmane kills his son Rhadamiste under a false name; Atrée indeed desires to slay his brother and does slay his nephew, but Atrée is an exceptionally strong horror. As a rule, disguises and misunderstandings protect the brother who might marry the sister<sup>3</sup> and excuse the parricidal hand. Other violences actually occur in all crudity, such as trying to drown one's wife, striking one's mother, and giving a father his son's blood to drink. Such was the "new shudder" that Crébillon gave the stage.

I will anticipate by saying that certain of these veneered melodramatic terrors, which in spite of their author's twisted formula did not lead to pity, have their milder echo in Ducis. Either writer, although choosing subjects akin to those of Euripides and Sophocles,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brunetière, *Époques du théâtre français*, Paris, 1893, pp. 192-216 (*Rhadamiste et Zénobie*).

<sup>2</sup> See Lanson, *loc. cit.*, also *Hist. de la litt. fr.* (11th ed.), pp. 646-47. Crébillon's chief plays, after *Atrée et Thyeste*, are *Électre*, 1708, *Rhadamiste et Zénobie*, 1711.

<sup>3</sup> Something like this looms in nearly all these dramas.

<sup>4</sup> The subjects generally of primitive times or stage-craft, of mythological rehandlings. Compare Wagner and the pre-Shakespearean atrocities.

is much less Greek than Byzantine: there are too many signs of decadence, too much artificial expression and *romanesque* juggling for the sense of fate and the sweeping pall of tragedy. Crébillon soon acknowledged his error, in words whose very spirit subsequently stimulated our dramatist:<sup>1</sup>

Je vois bien que j'ai eu tort de concevoir trop fortement la tragédie comme une action funeste qui devait être présentée aux yeux des spectateurs sous des images intéressantes; qui doit les conduire à la pitié par la terreur: *mais avec des mouvements et des traits qui ne blessent ni leur délicatesse, ni les bienséances.*

That voices exactly the ambition of Ducis. But I do not predicate the direct influence of Crébillon across two generations. It seems a question to a certain extent of a common aim and, to a larger extent, of social and dramatic conditions that had survived—with a demand for added decorations. Ducis indeed rather looks askance at his predecessor, calling him a "singular" person, "plein d'une vigueur inculte et d'une rudesse originale." And he adds that Crébillon "fut presque étranger à sa nation comme à son siècle."<sup>2</sup> Qualifying the last statement, one may recall that Shakespeare bore much the same reputation.

A common set of conditions would also account for two apparent infiltrations from the *comédie larmoyante* into the pages of Ducis. Everybody was more or less lachrymose and Ducis particularly so. Everybody wanted art to represent goodness after the order of Greuze; and the depiction of villains who may be admirable *au fond* is not original with La Chaussée or Ducis: it finds defense in Corneille,<sup>3</sup> *renchérissant* on Aristotle.

Such then might reasonably be the contortions that Shakespeare would have to undergo on being forced into the neo-classic mold. He might be diluted with tears; he might be forced into brutal though somehow *bienséantes* attitudes; but whatever his attitude, he would speak in very Voltairian Alexandrines, with deference to a "sort of general oneness," abstractness, and politeness. Would this also accord with the personality and ideals of the Shakespeare-purveyor, Ducis?

<sup>1</sup> Preface, dated 1715, to *Atrée et Thyeste*—italics mine.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres*, I, 11. The edition used is that of 1826, 4 vols. Nepveu, Paris. The Shakespearean plays occupy the first two volumes.

<sup>3</sup> In the *Discours de l'utilité et des parties du poème dramatique*.

## II

He was a man of excellent character and heart. He abounded in all kinds of genuine affection, paternal, filial, and toward his friends. His letters are frequently very charming bits of prose, and Sainte-Beuve would have us remember that fact when impatient with the apparently conventional rhetoric of his dramas.<sup>1</sup> His impeccable private life, the proven esteem of his contemporaries, and the intensity of his affections are points to be borne in mind. He was the genuine Man of Feeling of his age.

He conceived of himself otherwise. He was a "wild bird," a "vieux chêne à demi dépouillé et rugueux."<sup>2</sup> The best-known painting of him, caught in the act of writing *Léar*, presents him with flying locks and a skyward-pointing craggy expression. "Il était *lion* par son père, disait-il, et *berger* par sa mère." And Sainte-Beuve follows with approval of the style and psychology of this self-criticism: "'Il y a dans mon clavecin poétique,' disait-il, 'des jeux de flûte et de tonnerre: comment cela va-t-il ensemble? Je n'en sais trop rien, mais cela est ainsi.'"

The truth is that all the thunder of *Le Roi Léar* is not worth a single pastoral note from his kindly letters. He deceived himself about his inspiration, as did many a would-be "romantique échevelé" like Jules Lefèvre or Boulay-Paty. Neither they nor Ducis were other than mild-mannered gentlemen who tried to construct an astral self fitted to dwell in the midst of alarms. The *drame sombre*, amply derided by Voltaire, was the natural frame for Ducis' projection of his tragic muse: his sunny temperament reacted safely among literary horrors. But his own character shows in the native goodness of all his heroes and several of his villains.

He extended his affections to include his admirations; and the chief of these, very consistently, were Shakespeare and Voltaire. He kept before his eyes in writing *Hamlet* an engraving of its original author and another of Garrick in the title-rôle. He always

<sup>1</sup> Ste.-Beuve, *Causeries du lundi*, VI, 456-73, and *Nouveaux lundis*, IV, 318-91. Also G. Pellissier, "Le Drame Shakespearéen" in *Essais de litt. contemporaine*, 4th ed., Paris, 1894, pp. 69-109. The disposition of Ducis comes out clearly from his correspondence (*Œuvres*, IV) and from the *Épîtres dédicatoires* to his plays. *Hamlet* and *Le Roi Léar* are affectionately dedicated respectively to his father and mother (I, 69-71; 321-24.)

<sup>2</sup> Ste.-Beuve, VI, 457-58, 471.

celebrated Shakespeare's birthday, which he called the "fête de Saint-Guillaume." Crowning the bard's bust with flowers, Ducis would tell Campenon, "Les anciens couronnaient de fleurs les sources où ils avaient puisé."<sup>1</sup> It is an authentic case of literary *engouement*.

Voltaire's second fulminating letter on Shakespeare was read before a séance of the Academy in March, 1778. Just a year afterward that institution welcomed as Voltaire's successor the man whose task it was to reconcile the two systems. Time's revenges were swift; yet Ducis' *Discours* on this occasion is all to the honor of his French master and is more than the conventional tribute. It contains as well his own *ars dramatica*.<sup>2</sup>

He holds first that Voltaire's renown, traversing all Europe to reach posterity, sprang originally from his theater. In using the English influence (concerning which Ducis has an excellent page) Voltaire acted like a legislator who should strive to import barbaric virtues into a civilized—and enervated—race. His method was to give more energy to the action, more vehemence to the interest, the dialogue, and the pathos. Consequently, in painting love, Voltaire drew tragedy from the faded gallantry and bad taste of the lesser Racinian imitators by insisting on the principle that love should either dominate the stage or should not appear at all.

All this sounds like eulogy indeed, but fairly intelligent eulogy. The subtle danger is that Ducis, like all eighteenth-century dramatic theorists, sounds much more plausible in speeches and prefaces than he does in plays; and that here he is really admiring Voltaire only for the same plausibility, unsupported by consistent action. For if the latter makes the point about the domination of love, we have seen that he nevertheless twice gives the heart-interest a feeble and secondary part.

Continuing, Ducis differentiates his predecessor's treatment of the master-passion from that of Racine: Voltaire is less *nuancé*, stronger in sweep, and his masculine lovers are as impetuous as himself; but the women—and here is where Ducis most commends him—

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Ste.-Beuve, VI, 472. See for Ducis' character the *Notice* by Campenon in the former's *Œuvres*, IV, iii-xcviii.

<sup>2</sup> *Œuvres*, I, 1-51.

are possessed above all of "cette sensibilité douce et tendre." For example, Zaïre is shown as sweet rather than strong, as seductive rather than overpowering.

But Voltaire has "enlarged the field of tragedy among us." (Indeed it was one of the Patriarch's chief claims.) This is how he did it: "C'est lui qui le premier a fait entendre ces cris déchirants et terribles sortis du cœur d'une mère; qui a osé substituer les transports de la nature à ceux de l'amour." This shows a momentary forgetfulness of Racine on the part of Ducis, but it shows more than anything else an approval of his master's course in frequently depicting the family affections. The word "nature" is used in exactly the same sense by Auger, in attributing the same dramatic merit to Ducis:<sup>1</sup> "Thomas disait à son ami: 'Vous serez le poète de la nature.' . . . C'est aux sentiments de la nature qu'il doit ses plus heureuses aspirations et ses succès les plus éclatants." Practically all of the versions that we shall consider fully develop one or another of the natural affections.

Voltaire is further praised for the variety of nations and manners that he depicts—another point that the Patriarch had made himself—and *Sémiramis* is credited with giving the "premier exemple de ce merveilleux effrayant et sombre"; this refers to the question of apparitions which had already troubled Ducis in connection with *Hamlet*. Follows an interesting defense of the  *récit*, which deserves to rank as a classic plea:

Mais avec quel art il a distingué les moments d'action qui deviennent plus effrayants ou plus majestueux quand on les voit, de ceux que les prestiges de l'imagination doivent embellir ou créer, et qu'il ne faut point voir pour en être frappé d'une manière plus puissante.

The rules in general, declares Ducis, are made to be observed. It is true that a "happy irregularity," artistic enthusiasm, may sometimes impose and subjugate. But "it is not in this assembly," he prudently adds, "that I invite talent to free itself from those rules, which are only the usual march of genius watched over by taste." Yet elsewhere<sup>2</sup> he makes one bold exception, in favor of Shakespeare, to the tyranny of rules, and adds that his freedom does

<sup>1</sup> L. S. Auger in the *Avertissement* to Ducis' *Œuvres*, I, viii.

<sup>2</sup> *Avertissement* to *Le Roi Léar*, I, 325.



not at all diminish the glory "du plus vigoureux et du plus étonnant poète tragique qui ait peut-être jamais existé." It is not the only time that Ducis is caught between his two admirations.

His praises of Voltaire for the "idée sublime" of making the stage a moral agent are much what we might expect. More pointed is the dwelling on sentiment, which he calls the "first truth" and which easily redeems Voltaire's occasional offenses against *vraisemblance* and regularity. "Je demanderai," he challenges, "si au théâtre le jugement des pleurs ne l'emporte pas sur celui de la raison." The only important word which Ducis uses more frequently than *pleurs* is the word *larmes*.

His discovery of feeling in Voltaire makes him prone also to observe that author's "humanity." This incidentally is the trait that loomed large in Shakespeare, according to the authors of the Le Tourneur translation; Ducis must have seen their significant observation that "descending to the poor man's hut, he saw humanity there and did not disdain to depict it."<sup>1</sup> Ducis personally did not often descend to that hut: he remained among the circles frequented by Voltaire. Hence his awkward dilemma—how to reconcile his own humanity and that of Shakespeare with the neo-classic "nobility" of personages and language. The most perplexing dilemma of all is best given in his own words:<sup>2</sup>

Je n'ignorais pas que la sévérité de nos règles et la délicatesse de nos spectateurs nous chargent de chaînes que l'audace anglaise brise et dédaigne, et sous le poids desquelles il nous faut pourtant marcher dans des chemins difficiles avec l'air de l'aisance et de la liberté.

The Voltairian technique of Ducis, independently of what elements Shakespeare furnished, may just here be illustrated by his *Œdipe chez Admète* (1778).<sup>3</sup> This play, of the same date as the eulogium which I have summarized, largely follows Voltaire both in subject and method. The Patriarch, to please the groundlings, had introduced into the Oedipus story a love-intrigue which was subsequently deemed superfluous; Ducis fused the *Alkestis* with the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Jusserand, *Shakespeare in France under the Ancien Régime*, New York and London, 1899, p. 416. The English translation of this work is the more generally accessible and will be often cited.

<sup>2</sup> I, 325.

<sup>3</sup> I, 237-317.

*Oedipus at Colonus*—and afterward (1797) took out the *Colonus* part, making it a separate drama in three acts. Both writers then hesitate, for all their classic descent, concerning the unity of action. Ducis further, by bringing in Admetus and his palace (in addition to the Fates and their temple), renounces complete unity of place. He generally does. And one main difference between the neo-classic drama and its Racinian prototype is that the former, while dogmatizing about the unities, shuffles and compromises when it comes to performance; it tries to stitch up a garment that is too loose for Racine and too tight for Shakespeare.

Without following the *péripéties* of Ducis' play, one may call attention to the exposition, which is worked like Voltaire's by means of the arrival of a stranger at court; to the excess of vague and banal rewordings; to the method of filling the gaps between acts by *récits*; to the unusual length of these makeshifts—there is one of seventy lines; to such Voltairian devices as interruption with *suspension* (. . . .), antitheses, common rimes, *chevilles*, and repetitions like "il vient, il vient." There are gleams of preciosity—as distinguished from the more abundant periphrasis—in such expressions as "tes jours me sont acquis" or "rouvrir encore son flanc" of one's sad country. More characteristic of Ducis himself are the soft words ("mes doux embrassements"), the stale figures, and the inevitable flood of trite moral and *sensible* reflections.

### III

We are still not certain to what extent Shakespeare was popularized as reading-matter, when Ducis began the stage-versions with *Hamlet* in 1769. The curiosity first aroused by the *Lettres philosophiques* (1734), stimulated by the well-informed Prévost and Le Blanc's *Lettres d'un Français à Londres*,<sup>1</sup> could hardly have been quite satisfied by La Place's meagre translations.<sup>2</sup> The first two volumes of his work are devoted to Shakespeare: La Place professedly translates *Othello*, *Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Macbeth*, and *Hamlet*. For the last of these and one other, he will serve as a source to Ducis. La Place analyzed more plays than he translated, and even in the

<sup>1</sup> Three vols., The Hague, 1745.

<sup>2</sup> *Théâtre anglais*, 8 vols., 1745-48.

earlier group, as Le Blanc said, analyses proved no less acceptable than "extraits."<sup>1</sup>

The propaganda of La Place—who had rather penetrating views on Shakespeare—and later of Garrick, Mme. Riccoboni, etc., do not stand out sharply from the general Anglomania of the time. It was usually a zeal not according to knowledge. Shakespeare was confused with the *drame sombre*;<sup>2</sup> the legends concerning Young and Ossian traversed the land; sentimentality formed strange alliances with a nascent realism. The English influence, which, as I think may be shown, had been primarily philosophical under Voltaire's earlier sway, became mainly belletristic after the turn of the century. The condition of the public mind, in 1769, would exhibit an uncertain amount of knowledge and a larger amount of curiosity.

Ducis himself knew practically no English and was dependent upon the French versions. But he caught the movement on the rise and the success of his second-hand renderings is indubitable. This fact and still more the wide popularity of Le Tourneur's translations<sup>3</sup> provoked, as is well known, the last stand of Voltaire, alarmed at the size of the avalanche that he had originally loosened.<sup>4</sup> Yet, granting a popular hearing for Shakespeare, it cannot be too often recalled what an adulterated article was served under that name and how it was served to an audience more *raffiné*, conventional, and timorous than any other recorded in dramatic history.

*Hamlet* was our author's first and not least important attempt to please this audience. It appears that the subject was already better known than the rest of Shakespeare, through many excerpts and allusions, through the eternal debate (Voltaire, La Place, *et al.*) over the introduction of the grave-diggers. The question of the ghost—close kin to the ghost that killed Voltaire's *Sémiramis*—was

<sup>1</sup> Pellissier, article cited, p. 81. Cf., for the general Shakespearean vogue, Jusserand, pp. 214 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Which apparently sprang from English melodrama.

<sup>3</sup> Twenty vols., Paris, 1776-82. Vols. I and II (1776) contained *Othello* and *Julius Caesar*; Vols. III and IV (1778), *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*; Vols. V and VI (1779), *Lear* and *Hamlet*. From these dates, and from other detailed testimony, it can be proven that Ducis uses Le Tourneur for the last four of his six versions. Le Tourneur is far superior to La Place. He is still current in Guizot's adaptation. On the whole he seems to have done fairly well for his time, though his "literalness" still forms matter for debate. See Miss Cushing, *Pierre Le Tourneur*, New York, 1908.

<sup>4</sup> The first *Lettre à l'Académie* was read on the appearance of Le Tourneur's first volume in 1776.

also of a throbbing actuality, and a third question, that of the funeral urn, owed its birth to Ducis' personal creativeness.

Perplexed and haunted by the mad Englishmen's genius, he proposes the subject of Hamlet to Lekain, who disserts upon the temerity of the enterprise and politely refuses. The dramatist notifies us in his preface, "J'ai donc été obligé en quelque façon de créer une pièce nouvelle"<sup>1</sup>—to temper that wind to the lambs of the *parterre*. Shakespeare filtered through La Place into Ducis gave "a hybrid drama, Greek and Danish, French and English all at once."<sup>2</sup>

Like every play we deal with, it is written in Alexandrines throughout.<sup>3</sup> The unities are preserved, in that the action passes entirely in the palace and the question of time does not come up at all.<sup>4</sup> The list of personages include a Hamlet, king of Denmark; a Gertrude, his mother, widow of the late king; a Claudius, first prince of the blood; an Ophélie, daughter of Claudius; an Elvire, confidante of Gertrude. There are only three other speaking parts, though Polonius (as confidant to Claudius and a sort of accommodating "super") speaks much less than in the original and "Norceste" merely listens to Hamlet.

The exposition begins immediately, in the classic way, by a statement of the political situation and the *état d'âme* of Claudius. He tells about a sinister storm that accompanied the death of the late king and quotes a lengthy speech of his own delivered on that occasion. He is conspiring with Polonius to unseat Hamlet, and fortunately he has Gertrude under his thumb. The ghost scene of course is dispensed with; Hamlet, instead of appearing, is described as "mourant," "morne." In the second scene, Claudius pays court in form to Gertrude. But she refuses to hear him. She is repentant from the beginning on account of their double crime—for Gertrude is considered as guilty as Claudius. She wishes the memory of their passion to perish and lives only to see her son crowned. Leaving Claudius with an exhortation to a better life, she sends for Polonius

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Pellissier, p. 90. The title-rôle was subsequently given to Molé.

<sup>2</sup> Jusserand, p. 419. In this volume (pp. 416-35) are given short and pointed descriptions of the plays I shall discuss. By analyzing them more in detail, I hope constantly to bring out that sharp antagonism of Shakespeare v. neo-classicism.

<sup>3</sup> The only exception is the incidental one of the willow-song in Othello. See below.

<sup>4</sup> "Hamlet, tragédie en cinq actes, imitée de l'anglais," *Œuvres*, I, 67-152.

to carry out her orders. She learns of the arrival of Horatio-Norceste, who will, she hopes, enliven Hamlet's melancholy. It will readily be seen that none of these interviews are in Shakespeare.

In the second act, Gertrude fully confesses her crimes to Elvire. She had intended giving poison to her husband with her own hand—but she falters before the actual deed and only leaves the cup where he drinks it. Thus even retrospective “crudity” is avoided. It seems that the king was taking medicine, or in neo-classic phraseology

Empruntait le secours de ces puissants breuvages  
Dont un art bienfaisant montra les avantages.

When Elvire asks, “What monster led you to this *forfait*?” the queen answers simply, “L’amour.” Her love, if guilty, is at least refined and repentant. In Shakespeare what is between the two is not love at all—it is effective realism. But here no one hurls the rude epithets which clash in every page of the original; the gross facts are veiled as much as may be by an elegant remorse, by manifestations of a mother's persistent affection. Indeed Gertrude is almost sympathetic. It may be said at once that she is really cast for the heroine of the play. The point is then brought out that everybody fears Hamlet. The reason for this is hard to imagine, since Hamlet, the redoubtable, now comes on fleeing from the ghost. He has already, according to report, shouted his frightful cries “all over the place”—perhaps hardly a classic rendering of “ces lieux.” This is in lieu of the grim irony of “Art thou there, truepenny?” etc. The ghost is here restricted to his normal habitat, the *coulisse*.

Norceste, who appears as the third confidant, had written the prince concerning the death of a contemporary English monarch (we are not told which), who had been poisoned by his wife. Hamlet now says that this incident first awakened his suspicions of his own relatives. He tells these suspicions to Norceste, whereas the real Hamlet makes no such confidence. Follows a *récit* of the ghost's revelations, substituted for two of Shakespeare's scenes. It is related how Hamlet summoned the “dear and terrible shade,” who came and called for vengeance, reappeared, called again for vengeance, and was generally fearsome. Observe that Hamlet described himself as trembling, *éperdu*, feeble:

La pitié m'attendrit, le meurtre m'épouvante.

His native indecision and weakness are exaggerated in Ducis. They mark him from the very beginning, before the "pale cast of thought" has had time to operate. The real Hamlet responds instinctively to his father's first call; this man runs away from the ghost to the arms of Norceste, who cannot subdue his terrors with the assurance that the apparition is nothing but a bad dream. Yet he and other characters constantly inform us that Hamlet is furious, terrible, a "tigre impitoyable." It is all a part of the same vicious theory of substituting words for action.

Now comes in the curious inventiveness of Ducis. The whole device of the play-king and play-queen is done away with, and in its stead it is agreed that Norceste shall relate to the guilty ones his story of the poisoned English king—the purpose being of course to extract their confession and discomfiture. The scene closes with an allusion to the funeral urn of the late king, which Hamlet will bring out, if only to "fatigue the eyes" of the criminals.

Claudius and Polonius introduce Act III by more conspiring. Claudius thinks he can handle satisfactorily the matter of Hamlet's coronation. This threatened ceremony, by the way, is used throughout as a connecting link and an element of suspense. Claudius has skilfully won over a large party by spreading the belief that Hamlet himself poisoned his father—whence his melancholy. With the entrance of the others, an opportunity is given for Norceste to tell his King-of-England anecdote. This trick is played in a singularly unconvincing and undramatic manner. The result, however, just contrary to Shakespeare, is that Claudius brazens it out with ease and Gertrude is the one who is disturbed, though not to excess. After a vague consultation between these two, Ophélie at last appears. Ophélie, being the daughter of Claudius, the niece of Gertrude, the cousin of Hamlet, serves as the knot to this new *drame de famille*. But her rôle is perhaps where Ducis has best succeeded, the reason being that, madness apart, she is almost *ingénue* in Shakespeare. The young girl will now make, with Madame's permission, a disclosure to her aunt. It is to the effect that the cause of Hamlet's gloom is really nothing but his love for her and his despair of bringing that love to a happy termination. For we learn that the late king had harshly forbidden Ophélie to marry. The repentant Gertrude

listens sympathetically, revokes the decree, and promises her blessing.

The fourth act, opening with Hamlet's soliloquy, offers as fair an opportunity for textual comparison as we shall have:

Je ne sais que résoudre . . . . immobile et troublé. . . .  
 C'est rester trop longtemps de mon doute accablé;  
 C'est trop souffrir la vie et le poids qui me tue.  
 Eh! qu'offre donc la mort à mon âme abattue?  
 Un asile assuré, le plus doux des chemins  
 Qui conduit au repos les malheureux humains.  
 Mourons. Que craindre encore quand on a cessé d'être?  
 La mort . . . . c'est le sommeil . . . . c'est un réveil peut-être.  
 Peut-être . . . . Ah! c'est ce mot qui glace épouvanté  
 L'homme au bord du cercueil par le doute arrêté.  
 Devant ce vaste abyme il se jette en arrière,  
 Ressaisit l'existence, et s'attache à la terre.  
 Dans nos troubles pressans qui peut nous avertir  
 Des secrets de ce monde où tout va s'engloutir?  
 Sans l'effroi qu'il inspire, et la terreur sacrée  
 Qui défend son passage et siège à son entrée,  
 Combien de malheureux iraient dans le tombeau,  
 De leurs longues douleurs déposer le fardeau!  
 Ah! que ce port souvent est vu d'un œil d'envie  
 Par le faible agité sur les flots de la vie!  
 Mais il craint dans ses maux, au-delà du trépas,  
 Des maux plus grands encore, et qu'il ne connaît pas.  
 Redoutable avenir, tu glaces mon courage!  
 Va, laisse à ma douleur achever son ouvrage.  
 Mais je vois Ophélie. Oh, si des traits si doux  
 Suspendaient mes tourmens!

---

Nymph, in thy orisons

Be all my sins remembered.

It will be seen that only a few phrases in this clearly reflect Shakespeare. The rest, poetic expression apart, shows a similarity of general movement, with stop-gaps introduced by *La Place* or *Ducis*. Yet in spite of inversions and banalities, perhaps because of a certain respectable harmony, the soliloquy is better rendered—from the French standpoint—than we might anticipate, much better than anything else in the play.

Ophélie, entering at the peroration, is not told to go to a nunnery, because Hamlet still remains decidedly in love with her. But his tragic secret separates them; she pleads in vain to share it. There is a rather pathetic scene between the lovers. The intervention of Gertrude, her exhortations to cheerfulness and marriage, provoke a more vivid appearance of the ghost. Hamlet, "seeing the shade," becomes excited, addresses it, and ends by obscurely threatening Claudius. There is nothing of the prayer scene or the slaying of Polonius. The act ends with another dreary political discussion between Claudius and his henchman.

The next and last opens with Norceste bringing in that fateful urn, by way of grave-yard scene. Ophélie pleads for Claudius, but Hamlet seems now to have set his resolution—

Ma gloire est d'être fils.

Taking issue with her on the paternal question, Hamlet enunciates this excellent sentiment:

Mais un vertueux père est un bien précieux  
Qu'on ne tient qu'une fois de la bonté des dieux.

He has before informed us that

Les effets sont pareils, quand la cause est la même.

Ducis has dared to render the strange solemn scene between mother and son. It is one of the few things which he has preserved, and the method of it is this: Hamlet tells his mother what he is going to do; he accuses her, sadly and sternly, as in the English—but without the realism. The urn, whose ashes according to the superstition have seemed to stir at her entrance, will officiate in the supreme test. Since his mother will not admit her guilt, he requires of her to swear her innocence over this altar. She attempts to do so and faints, which was one of the resources of former good-breeding. Hamlet falls moved and appeased at her feet.

The coronation affair, which has been hanging in the balance, precipitates the *dénouement*. The much-used ghost enters once more. Claudius and the crowd rush on and attack Hamlet, but in a mild way, without clash of swords. Hamlet then, in one version, actually kills Claudius on the stage, almost an unheard-of thing; but in a



more acceptable variant—Ducis frequently dodges behind a variant—the prince retires to the *coulisse* for this deed, then comes back and tells about it, much as in *Mérope*. Gertrude confesses the poisoning, though not her infidelity, and kills herself; which was usual enough. Hamlet survives. He has decided to follow Ophélie's advice to "groan no more, but reign," for duty's sake.

Je saurai vivre encore; je fais plus que mourir.

Such is the conclusion, quite in Voltaire's antithetical vein.

The great divergences are evident. There is much less blood: Hamlet is left, Polonius is left, Ophélie is left—and she does not go mad. The effect of the conspiracy detail is even to mitigate the vengeance *motif* in the slaying of Claudius. We observe the *beau rôle* given Gertrude, the slurring of infidelity. Claudius himself is a *naïf* sort of villain. M. Jusserand points out that the "king and queen . . . declare their intentions with the most dangerous simplicity. Ducis' monsters are black, but not complicated."<sup>1</sup> There is no grim humorous contrast, as represented by the grave-diggers or Polonius. The characters, the philosophy, the tragedy are all quite attenuated, strictly according to the neo-classical prescription. Ducis' habit of explaining, repeating, expanding by commonplaces further serves immoderately to water his little wine.

The reason for dwelling on this Shakespearean echo is that historically it is the most important of these attempts and furthermore it gives the type. It shows how Ducis took from his master, as Pellissier says,<sup>2</sup> hardly more than "une certaine excitation chaleureuse pour se monter l'imagination sur les mêmes sujets." And Sainte-Beuve, indicating how Shakespeare was sentimentalized *à la* Young, declares:<sup>3</sup> "Aux tragédies de Ducis, il ne faut demander ni plan, ni style suivi, mais des mots et quelques scènes."

Ducis, "bonhomme Ducis," as Napoleon called him, his happy gift of conciliation once proven, did well to continue on his easy path. He watched his public to some effect. Three years later he gave to the world *Roméo et Juliette* (1772),<sup>4</sup> a subject which had already been staged by young Chastellux in 1770. At first a doubtful success, Ducis' play was worked over and "alla aux nues." Its

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 419.

<sup>2</sup> P. 94.

<sup>3</sup> *C. de l.*, VI, 459.

<sup>4</sup> *Œuvres*, I, 157-234.

final triumph was partly due to the fact that its author had two strings to his bow.

The plot is taken both from Shakespeare and Dante. The former gave the groundwork of a love-affair between rival families and the latter furnished a grisly but distant episode. Ducis, in his preface, bows in passing to his sources, but considers it "inutile de m'étendre sur les obligations."<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare is much deleted of course, and the action is patched in with the story of Ugolino and his sons—the ravenous rôle being assigned to old Montaigu. Ducis remarks that the audience seemed pleased with the character of this dweller in the woods and avenger of sons, a sort of Timon *manqué*, whose soul, however, was "autrefois vertueuse et tendre." We are again in the presence of ruffians who must have their soft side; it is the Cornelian virtue universally bestowed.

In piecing two sources together, as he did also in *Œdipe chez Admète*, the dramatist ventures on certain departures from the strict classic tradition, since the scene changes to the tomb in the last act. From half a dozen instances, it is clear that Ducis does not mind tampering with the unity of place; it is rare, however, that he keeps the full tragic ending, as he does in this play. The list of characters again is shortened by half. The gossiping nurse, like Polonius, is replaced by a characterless confidante, Mercutio becomes Albéric, Tybalt and the other roysterers vanish entirely. Dolvédo, a young man of mysterious antecedents, is the lover of Juliette. He is represented as a "generous warrior," and "Dolvédo" is the *nom de guerre* of Roméo, son of Montaigu. Juliette alone is in possession of this secret, though she imparts it to her confidante in the first fifty lines. There is a great deal about banishment and, as always, about filial and fraternal affection. The child Roméo was torn from his father's arms, wandered about a time, and finally, all unknown, was adopted by Capulet, in whose house he was brought up. This fostering propinquity may explain the attachment of the lovers; but it hardly explains the omission of the balcony scene. Instead, Dolvédo comes in with "des drapeaux" in the *L'Aiglon* style and addresses this salutatory to his lady:

Je puis donc, content et glorieux,  
Madame, avec transport reparaître à vos yeux.

<sup>1</sup> I, 155.

Characterized also as a "guerrier parvenu," the young man in that capacity proceeds to boast of his martial exploits. The flags are really for old Capulet, who comes in and looks them over with an appraiser's eye, but gives the preference to Paris, the other suitor. This fact is according to Shakespeare. But we do not hear the clash of weapons, the rough and ready Tybalt, the servants brawling. We have instead this drawing-room *milieu* and one can almost imagine the old man taking snuff and dabbing at his patches. He says that Paris would be a convenient man in case of a fight and Dolvédo must really help him make that match for Juliette. That young lady, who has spoken prettily enough when alone with her lover, who has made a very respectful remonstrance on the subject of Paris, is shortly reproached with lukewarmness by Dolvédo-Roméo. She retorts—

J'ai moins d'emportement, ingrat, j'ai plus d'amour.

But the truth is that Juliette is by no means Shakespeare's ardent heroine; she is enfeebled, inconsistent, conventional. Adjoining her lover to be "virtuous," she demands of him—

Pensez-vous qu'il soit libre aux enfants téméraires  
De s'unir aux autels sans l'aveu de leurs pères ?

Ducis at any rate does not want society to think so; and that perhaps is why he leaves the tragic ending.

The movement increases when old Montaigu descends upon them with wolflike hate and Orphic utterances. There are various interviews which leave unraveled two mysteries—the identity of Roméo and the reason for Montaigu's deeper desire for vengeance. There is a stormy scene with Capulet, when, as in Shakespeare, the duke of Verona tries to patch up the feud. He has to arrest old Montaigu. A fight takes place none the less, and Roméo takes his father's part and kills Juliette's brother. After that, he is alternately loved and hated by her in accordance with the tradition. But there is still "méprise"; Capulet appeals to Dolvédo-Roméo for vengeance on Roméo, cleverly alluding to the flags. The mystery of Roméo's birth then comes out and there is much declamation.

The fourth act—always hard to keep in tone—introduces Ducis' novelty. But first Ferdinand again plays the peace-maker and with

more apparent effect. The lovers will unite themselves and their families. As the result of appeals to virtue and "citizenship," there is a general *attendrissement*. Even old Montaigu requests the company to be touched by his tears. But he is merely pretending reconciliation—a trick that he may have learned from Atrée—in order to gain his ends. This is shown when he insists that Roméo shall kill Juliette. In quite an impressive scene most of the cords are pulled between father and son. The old man tells how he was forced to watch his other children done to death. It now appears that twenty years ago Capulet's brother poisoned Montaigu's offspring. They offered him their blood as sustenance; and now they call for their enemy's. This is a genuine neo-classic thrill. It is clearly evident that Ducis has no objection to piling on horrors, provided they are heard of but seldom seen.<sup>1</sup>

The *dénouement* in the tomb—a scene rather uncalled for according to our dramatist's preliminaries—might be impressive from a spectacular standpoint. There is not the same series of mistakes as in the original. Juliette does not kill herself from grief at the death of Roméo; she dies first, wishing to remove the obstacle between the families. Both lovers actually perish on the stage, showing that the author's artistic conscience occasionally operates, even to the exclusion of the variant.

It is a curious *rifacimento*, somewhat less lively, on account of the ground-tone of moralities and platitudes, than even the above abstract. One is struck by the conventionality of the larger part over against the attempted soarings. When Ducis dared be bold, he dared not be too bold, and the next moment he dared not be bold at all. The simplicity of his stage-craft, his lack of the "art des préparations," and his hurry to get everything before us may be instanced by a device at the beginning of the play. After Juliette has told her confidante about Dolvédo, the confidante submits this broad hint: "Suppose the old man who has recently come here should turn out to be Montaigu?" Juliette counters: "Suppose

<sup>1</sup> Jusserand (p. 425) alludes to the strictures passed upon Ducis by the *Correspondance Littéraire*—also by La Harpe and Marmontel—for the blood-guiltiness of the Montaigu-Ugolino story. But this very thing helped his success with the large public, which certainly had no objection to taking its *frisson* from afar. Ste-Beuve records that some of the traits in the old man's *récit* were deemed as beautiful as anything in Corneille (*C. de l.*, VI, 460).

my uncle had done disastrous things to Montaigu's sons?" Needless to say these are very awkward and unlikely anticipations on the part of the women. The principal fact about the play is that Montaigu's tower alone remains to strike the eye on a horizon from which the passionate sweep of young love has vanished.

## IV

Our good man is quiet for eleven years and in the meantime Le Tourneur's translation appeared. It provoked not only the dying howl of Voltaire but the recrudescence of Ducis, who acknowledged in a general way its vogue and his indebtedness.<sup>1</sup> One may question, however, whether *Léar* is any closer to Shakespeare than the *Hamlet* of 1769. I cannot see that Le Tourneur, comparatively faithful as he was, stimulated Ducis to the exercise of a like virtue. He dilutes, curtails, and follows his own sweet will afterward as before. What may be granted is a greater ease and a surer hand in following his own peculiar technique. But whatever may be thought of Ducis' maturity, the interval of time hardly seems to betoken very much advance in general dramatic tolerance. *Le Roi Léar* (1783) is in a sense its author's "strongest" play, and its action may as well be detailed for comparison.<sup>2</sup>

The *Avertissement*<sup>3</sup> admits a double debt, to Le Tourneur and to his "own inventions." That the subject was a "happy" one is proved by the flowing of his own tears during composition and by the tears of the audience afterward.<sup>4</sup> The piece is therefore "utile aux mœurs," and other fathers could take their children to it. We may readily imagine, indeed, the zeal with which Ducis would attack the subject of filial ingratitude. "Cependant, j'ai tremblé plus d'une fois, je l'avoue, quand j'ai eu l'idée de faire paraître sur la scène française un roi dont la raison est aliénée." Follows the passage about the severity of rules.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "La traduction . . . par M. Le Tourneur est entre les mains de tout le monde."—I, 325.

<sup>2</sup> I, 329–433.

<sup>3</sup> I, 325–26.

<sup>4</sup> According to Ste.-Beuve the tears were *de rigueur*. The mild Ducis is reported to have carried his daughters to a representation of *Léar* and to have declared afterward: "Si elles n'avaient pas fondu en larmes, je les aurais étranglées de mes mains." (!)—*C. de L.*, VI, 462.

<sup>5</sup> See above, p. 143.

The *dramatis personae* include twelve named characters, which is very full for the neo-classic play. Yet certain notable ones disappear from our vision. There is no Fool, in the first place. There are no "France" and "Burgundy." Goneril-Volnérille does not appear on the stage. There is no Gloucester and the sons of Gloucester—a model youth, Lénnox, being substituted for the vigorous bastard Edmund—are assigned to Kent; but this is an excusable tightening of the threads. The action is vaguely continuous. The place changes: two acts are in the castle of Cornouailles and three are near a cavern in the forest. That is, there is one change of scene as opposed to nearly twenty in Shakespeare.

The action begins only after the division of the kingdom and the banishment of Cordelia—known as Helmonde. Oswald gives in a *récit* to "Cornouailles" some of the previous history: Léal, the "inconstant vieillard," installed with Volnérille, regrets his loss of power and his harshness toward Helmonde. Cornouailles expresses his fear of revolutions, in which England is "féconde"; he thinks that troops are hidden in these very woods. Helmonde's whereabouts are unknown. Léal is characterized as "extrême en tout"; as in Shakespeare the very rashness of his behavior toward his best-loved daughter is used by the opposing side to argue his general fickleness.

Enter Régane, Albany, and the two sons of the banished Kent. Albany keeps his "mild" rôle, speaks of Léal as an august benefactor, and is not sure concerning the crimes imputed to Helmonde. Neither is Lénnox, who interrupts the censorious Régane with—

Des forfaits! Elle! O dieux, je ne les crus jamais!

Lénnox will thus prove *amouraché* of Helmonde, though Edgard, his brother, is the suitor who really counts. There is no such love-affair in Shakespeare: the courting there assigned to "France" consisted only of a speech or two. Cornouailles, who has revoked the banishment of Kent, appeals to the latter's sons to aid him in repelling the "insolent Danes," whose threatened attack replaces that of France as enveloping action. But instead Lénnox urges Edgard to come with him and console the weariness of their old father "sous son toit vertueux." Edgard refuses, saying he is not

his own master, and Lénnox, after extolling the happiness of Kent in exile and the general merit of a Sabine farm, makes a clumsy transition to the fate of Helmonde. Edgard can that tale unfold: Helmonde, who wished to marry Ulric the Dane, was accused by the "adroite Volnérille" of treason to her country and the intention of poisoning her father. Banished and a fugitive, Edgard has hidden her under the "impenetrable horror of a tutelary rock," i.e., in a cave. Edgard describes Helmonde's clothes and her affecting attitude when she hears of her father's downfall—

Quelquefois, au travers de sa douleur touchante,  
Un souris s'égaraît sur sa bouche innocente.

The combination inspired him to assemble friends, whom he has led to revolt and whom he holds ready to strike the "grand coup" tonight.

Kent finds the brothers and, uninformed of their project, remonstrates in vain at his abandonment. There is much filial and fraternal matter, which provides a poor echo of the Gloucester subplot. Shakespeare's admirable design of showing misplaced parental confidence in both plots is here badly twisted, since Kent's sons are too good. Albany returns to inform us that Léar has left Volnérille and that his reason is failing. Kent thereupon says that he will not lament the death of his king—the only thing that he would lament in Shakespeare.

Kent apparently remains on the stage between acts, and an old man is announced, blinded by tears, poverty-stricken, and with senses chilled by the cold. It is Léar who then enters. At first he does not know Kent (in spite of the fact that he is looking for him), but that nobleman shortly throws himself at his former master's feet. This scene corresponds vaguely to the one before Gloucester's castle. Ducis loses the effect of Lear's energetic anger and the mounting effect of the *two* interviews with his daughters. Léar speaks brokenly, already anticipating the loss of his reason and strength, complaining of Volnérille instead of cursing her, remorseful as to Helmonde. Kent tries to reassure him, but admits that the conduct of his own children leaves something to be desired (which is artificially Shakespearean) and concludes that both fathers had

better repair to the soil of the Sabine farm. Léar wishes to approach Régane first. In the presence of her and Cornouailles, he alternately requests her hospitality and upbraids her—confusing her with Volnérille. He apologizes for this and Régane has taken no stand as yet, when Kent returns to deliver these four remarkable lines:

(*À part*) Volwick m'a tout appris. (*À Léar*) Non, tu n'as plus de fille.  
Ce palais est pour toi tout plein de Volnérille.

(*Montrant le duc de Cornouailles*)

Régane est digne en tout de ce monstre odieux,  
Tu cherchais la vertu; le crime est en ces lieux.

Neither "Volwick" nor anybody else informs us of what this crime is nor why it should be immediately credited; which is another neo-classic way of assuming a terrible situation in order to conceal it. Kent none the less is at once put in chains (which reduces to half a line the scene of the stocks), and Léar, refusing the proffered aid of Albany, calls down the wrath of heaven upon the offspring of Régane. Léar and Kent are left alone; presently Volwick comes with the more definite exhortation:

Fuyez, le feu s'apprête.

He speaks, and Léar and Kent wander out into the storm.

The third act represents the tempest and night of Shakespeare, the cavern and conspiracy of Ducis. Edgard addresses a body of his soldiers to the effect that they are to follow Lénnox and save the country. The situation of Helmonde, he says, is what chiefly inflames his ardor. That heroine joins them, pleads for the cause of her father and receives their homage. An opportune burst of thunder presages victory.

Edgard, left alone with Helmonde, does not make love but declares:

Bientôt, Léar vengé par leur valeur guerrière. . . .  
Dieux! vous versez des pleurs!

This is a good example of "those suspensions, those solutions" which were almost the only form of abruptness left to the neo-classic tragedy. This one is probably imitated from the famous "Zaïre, vous pleurez" of Orosmane.



Helmonde weeps, she avows, because she has a presentiment (not particularly *vraisemblable*) that Régane in turn has chased her father out into the storm. Helmonde apostrophizes the thunder and the great gods, while Edgard urges the shelter of the *souterrain*. They withdraw and Léar then enters alone. He has lost his way; he is exposed to a terrific tempest of wind, hail, and lightning.<sup>1</sup> He also exhorts the storm to spend its fury on his feeble body. Kent finds him and they converse with a humanitarian touch suitable to the year 1783—

*Léar:*           Combien d'infortunés, soumis à notre empire,  
                  Réclament loin de nous la nature et nos soins!  
                  J'ai peut-être moi-même oublié leurs besoins.  
*Le Comte:*   Non, vos peuples jamais n'ont senti la misère.  
*Léar:*           Crois-tu qu'encor pour eux ma mémoire soit chère?

But Kent, observing the cavern, suggests that they retire there. Léar, rising superior to the storm, declares that a worse one will soon be raging in his own breast.

Up to this point, and very differently from Shakespeare, the language has been calm and measured. It now takes on a mild madness, when an old man called "Norelète" enters. Léar, "avec un égarement doux et paisible," demands of this proprietor of the cave—

Aurais-tu donc aussi donné tout à tes filles?

As in Shakespeare, this speech marks the beginning of Léar's insanity. But observe that Norelète replaces Shakespeare's strange Edgar; there is no wild triple madness of Lear, Edgar, and the Fool; and that "égarement doux" is characteristic of Léar's derangement throughout. He declares mysteriously that he has committed a great crime, he says smilingly that his daughter was "jeune et belle."<sup>2</sup> Then he falls into a state of insensibility. Norelète remarks that a young girl of that sort has been dwelling with him in his cave. Thus announced, Helmonde comes forth with Edgard. But Léar, con-

<sup>1</sup> Is this the "Appareil" so heartily recommended by Voltaire? "Ducis fait grande consommation de foudre et d'éclairs."—Ste.-Beuve, *C. de L.*, VI, 462.

<sup>2</sup> Compare

"Her voice was ever soft,  
Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman."  
(Act V, scene iii.)

fusing her with the other daughters, repulses her, wishes her laden with chains and dragged into judgment. He details his wrongs and weeps as he has wept before. Shakespeare's Lear says that his heart will burst before he weeps and Ducis, suddenly remembering that, makes his old man declare:

Je ne pleurerai plus.

Then L  ar, who feels that he was not born "pour aimer la vengeance," observes that he suffers less near this unrecognized daughter—who has a gentle countenance and seems of Helmonde's age. Assured that they are one and the same, he asks if it is possible that he sees his victim; and the semi-recognition follows in this style:

*L  ar:* C'est dans la sombre nuit un   clair qui me brille.  
Un tendre instinct me dit que vous   tes ma fille;  
Mais peut-  tre qu'aussi, pour calmer ma douleur,  
Votre noble piti   cherche    tromper mon coeur.  
Es-tu mon sang?

*Helmonde:* Mon p  re!

*L  ar:* O moment plein de charmes!

*Helmonde:* Helmonde est dans vos bras, voyez couler ses larmes.

And with the appearance of that familiar rime, one may trust that domestic bliss is near. But Ducis needed another turn of the screw. It continues:

*L  ar:* (*tirant son   p  e et voulant s'en percer*):

H   bien! puisque tu l'es, voil   mon ch  timent.

*Helmonde:* Que faites-vous, grands dieux!

*L  ar:* Je te venge.

*Helmonde:* Un moment!

Je vous trompais, seigneur; vous n'  tes point mon p  re.

*L  ar:* Oses-tu prendre un nom que la vertu r  v  re!

Va, ne m'abuse plus; va, fuis loin de mes yeux.

After which, he falls insensible and is taken into the cavern.

The trick is turned otherwise and later in the original, and indeed very little of the preceding is Shakespearean save in the most general way. What follows, in the last two acts, is even less so and may be briefly condensed.

Edgard, like Shakespeare's doctor, hopes that slumber may restore L  ar's faculties. At daybreak the old man is brought to the

mouth of the cave—on a “lit de roseaux”—and in a long fatherly scene he passes from ignorance of such words as “Léar” and “king” to a full recognition of Helmonde and Kent. He is himself again; but the tide of battle drawing near forces the friends back into the cavern. Kent has time to apostrophize the gods before the re-entrance of Helmonde and the advent of Oswald, who leads the opposing hosts. “Cette fille?” demands Oswald. “La mienne,” answers Norclète. Oswald, knowing that Léar is a fugitive in the neighborhood, searches the cave in vain; but as Helmonde feebly faints, he becomes suspicious and will carry her off; whereupon Léar walks out and gives himself up.

In the same setting, Cornouailles hears Oswald’s report and we learn that Léar has again fallen into a “doux égarement.” Régane stimulates her lord to vengeance on Helmonde by reminding him of her supposed crimes. Helmonde wishes only to attend her father; she admits that she is responsible for the present revolt; but she would rather die than betray the names of her allies. Enter Léar. “Avec un égarement paisible et plein de tendresse” (which is not a new kind of *égarement*), he includes Régane and Cornouailles in his affection—

Vers vous, mes chers enfants, c’est le ciel qui me guide.

Albany, entering with troops, states that the army of Edgard is near and (as in Shakespeare) quarrels with Cornouailles over the hostages. Oswald, who probably has his orders, takes Helmonde aside. The men of Cornouailles presently return victorious, with Edgard prisoner. Cornouailles brutally declares that Oswald has killed Helmonde, thereby again restoring Léar’s reason with the shock and thereby losing his own cause. For his men, at Edgard’s appeal, desert his inhuman standard and hail Léar king. This is done without violence, of course. Helmonde, equally of course, is not really killed. She is given to Edgard in marriage, Kent will watch over them, the traitors are punished, and Léar will end his days in peace.

It may be granted that this drama is more ingenious than the others: it is all the more false. The tremendous divergences from the original hardly need pointing out. Aside from the heart-interest and the general sentimentalism, there is the loss both of wild horror

and of tragic dignity; the pathos sinks into bathos, the pertinacious optimism has its unintentional comic relief. The plot is more concentrated, to be sure, it is simplified, but it is also emasculated.

A more important difference than any will emerge from the point of view of character contrast. Shakespeare's Lear is marked by the jealous affection of the aged, by a pathetic madness, but also by impetuosity and the pride of insulted fatherhood. The L  ar of Ducis is timid, gentle, and thoroughly *biens  ant* even in insanity. He pines for his crown, whereas the other cared not a button for his crown. The mild humanitarianized L  ar is really cowed by his bad daughters. He curses R  gane once, but there is no real scene, no contest of pride and will. He complains, he weeps, where Shakespeare's king swore that his heart would break first. L  ar    la Ducis is more pitiable than powerful. He is allowed no torrent of language to voice his "hysterica passio." His very desires for vengeance and death are expressed in passionless Alexandrines. There are more long "screeds" in this play than in any other by Ducis and frequently the feebleness comes through prosing about society, through generalizing about those social categories which Diderot would have us believe dramatic.

However, Ducis' deletions are consistent, historically interesting, and occasionally justifiable in themselves. Without being guilty of *l  se-Shakespeare* it may be held that certain things are best omitted from the play—the matter of Gloucester's eyes, the matter of his false childish leap from the cliff. Neo-classicism naturally omitted these, but it took a graver liberty in omitting the ghastliness of the triple madness and the grim horror around that scene. The storm-effect is also deleted and the milder madness of L  ar seems on all these accounts less convincing. In itself, perhaps it is not so badly, it is even feelingly done, save for too much self-pity. It is a good stroke to make L  ar take his one true daughter for R  gane or Voln  rille. But certainly his shifts from sanity to madness are too frequent.

There are moments of intensity that slip back into the maudlin. Ducis has no skill in transitions; he can touch only the one fountain. Such a Lear may make us weep but cannot make us wonder. The *motifs* of filial ingratitude and vengeance become hazy in the domi-

nant rôle accorded to the faithful daughter. Affection is stronger than hate and Ducis' sentimentality blurs the stark lines of Shakespeare's realism.

Treading on the heels of this success—which duly angered the critics—its author produced *Macbeth* the following year (1774). Here too he was reproached with his choice of subject and begged to write “une pièce tendre.”<sup>1</sup> Yet it would seem fairly “tender” to endow Lady Macbeth with a beloved young son. Her heroic rôle, thus qualified and dubbed with the inspiring name of Frédégonde was played by Madame Vestris.

The most remarkable thing in the play is Ducis' rendering of the sleep-walking scene. This offers a good opportunity—which is rare—for textual comparison. But to glance first at the author's general intentions and deviations.

The *avertissement*<sup>2</sup> alludes to the success of his other versions and to the “terrible” nature of this subject, which would naturally be more applauded at London than at Paris. Then he gives another expression of his dramatic recipe, compounded of Aristotle and Crébillon:

Je me suis appliqué d'abord à faire disparaître l'impression toujours révoltante de l'horreur, qui certainement eût fait tomber mon ouvrage; et j'ai tâché ensuite d'amener l'âme de mon spectateur jusqu'aux derniers degrés de la terreur tragique, en y mêlant avec art ce qui pouvait la faire supporter.

These precautions have subdued the critics, who allow him at least the merit of the “difficulté vaincue”—that common formula of the age, which meant at bottom that beauty was a *tour de force*. Ducis then proceeds to compliment Shakespeare and Siddons and to assign *Macbeth* a soul “née pour la vertu.”

The play itself is another compromise.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the scene shifts from the forest to the palace of Inverness. The setting is described several times, not only in the exceptionally detailed account of Lady Macbeth's somnambulism, but more *à la Ducis* in the vague and adjectival introductions to each act. The first is supposed to pass in “the most sinister spot of an antique forest,” adorned with rocks, caverns, and precipices, in short “un site épou-

<sup>1</sup> Pellissier, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> II, 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> II, 7-89.

vantable." This horrible place is covered by a "menacing and tenebrous" sky and decorated apparently by the firm of Radeliffe and Lewis. The setting for Act II repeats several of these epithets, freshly applied to the palace and, says in conclusion: "Il doit être d'un caractère terrible." These first gropings after the art of stage-directions are infantile, but they are quite in line with the budding English pseudo-romanticism.

In Act I Duncan and Glamis come to Birnam wood. There are didactic debates concerning that "ungrateful mortal" Macbeth. Glamis, first prince of the blood, absorbing the rôle of Banquo, is used also as confidant of Duncan. He recites a rimed history of Scotland, to the supposedly ignorant king. But first he tells us that two of Duncan's sons have been made away with before the beginning of the action. The remaining heir, Malcome, is kept in hiding and an old man is brought in who is secretly rearing the prince and makes prophecies concerning him. This *vieillard*, a replica of Norclète, is paraphrased as

Un de ces mortels<sup>1</sup> qui dans l'obscurité  
Par de mâles travaux domptent l'adversité.

The witches are *not* brought in, except in the usual  *récit*—and in a variant about the added "terror" of which Ducis hesitates. But seen or unseen, the weird sisters depress the spirits of Duncan, especially Hecate's substitute, "Iphycrone, interprète et ministre des dieux."

In the palace, there is first a  *récit* of Macbeth's victory, according to Shakespeare. Malcome has quite a rôle from the beginning. A family party of Macbeth, wife, and son is dissolved by the cares of empire, but the lady remains to tempt her husband by much talk about the witches, by dwelling on their prophecy, "tu seras roi," and by accusations against Glamis. To her are attributed the superstitious consultations and this first suggestion of crime comes from an interview with Iphycrone. But Lady Macbeth's motive is

O mon fils! quel espoir pour l'orgueil d'une mère.  
Un jour tu seras roi.

This maternal hope is the palliation Ducis offers for her crime.

<sup>1</sup> Since all men are "mortals."

The story continues to the effect that Macbeth has had a dream, like Crébillon's Atrée, anticipating the murder; and Duncan enters with the confidence of hospitality which he showed in Shakespeare.

Act III passes between midnight and dawn. It opens with Frédégonde's soliloquy (partly reminiscent of the original) on her husband's character. The presence and supposed designs of Banquo-Glamis are used to precipitate Macbeth's resolution. A second prophecy of the head-witch, meant to have the same effect, merely repeats. The final touch is given by a note which announcing the death of two other aspirants, leaves only Duncan and Glamis between Macbeth and the throne. Thereupon Frédégonde speaks forcibly and persuades him to the deed. There is some rather good dialogue through here, in the short Voltairian style; there is no brooding and bewildering sense of doom either before or afterward. All is arranged for Duncan's death—which was to be foisted on Glamis—when the soldiers of a rebel surround the castle. While Frédégonde hopes that Duncan will perish in the mellay, Macbeth runs to defend him.

The murder, as before, is accomplished between acts. We learn that though Macbeth drove the dagger, it is Frédégonde herself, according to him, who is the most guilty. The noblest trait in the real Macbeth is that he never reproaches his wife. This man says: "C'est toi, c'est toi, barbare, en empruntant ma main . . . ." and actually threatens to kill her next.

There is no banquet. The unity of time is practically preserved and it is immediately after the murder that Macbeth gives himself away—which is rather soon for a ghost to appear. The existence of Malcome is sprung on the harassed Macbeth. He is able to tide that over, but remorse makes him finally give up the crown and kill himself. Frédégonde (except in a variant) lives afterward, a prey to her own horror. For the shudder introduced here by Ducis—and the point of the sleep-walking scene—is that she kills her own son, through mistaking him for Malcome. The bloody cradle of the child is even introduced in the variant but scarcely on the stage. Here is a part of her somnambulism that leads to the melodramatic "parricide":

*Frédégonde (avec joie et un air de mystère):*

Ce grand coup fut caché dans la nuit.

La couronne est à nous. Macbeth, pourquoi la rendre ?

*(Avec le geste d'une femme qui porte plusieurs coups de poignard dans les ténèbres.)*

Sur le fils à son tour. . . .

*Sévar:* Ciel! que viens-je d'entendre!

*Frédégonde (en s'applaudissant, et avec la joie de l'ambition satisfaite):*

Oui, tout est consommé, mes enfants règneront.

For a page she mutters of her maternal ambition, of the blood which stains her hands, of her remorse and this fresh crime which fascinates her—all with very full stage-directions—and then:

*(Son front s'éclaircit par degrés, et passe insensiblement de la plus profonde douleur à la joie et à la plus vive espérance.)*

Quel espoir dans mon sein est rentré ?

*(Tout bas, comme appelant Macbeth pendant la nuit, et lui montrant le lit de Malcome qu'elle croit voir.)*

Macbeth! Malcome est là.

*(Avec ardeur.)*

Viens.

*(Croyant le voir hésiter et levant les épaules de pitié.)*

Comme il s'intimide!

*(Décidée à agir seule.)*

Allons.

*(Avec joie.)*

Il dort.

*(Avec la confiance de la certitude, et dans le plus profond sommeil.)*

Je veille . . . .

*(Elle regarde le flambeau d'un oeil fixe; elle le prend et se lève.)*

Et ce flambeau me guide.

*(Elle marche vers le côté du théâtre par lequel elle doit sortir. S'arrêtant tout-à-coup avec l'air du désir et de l'impatience, croyant entendre sonner l'heure.)*

Sa mort sonne.

*(Avec la plus grande attention, immobile, le bras droit étendu, et marquant chaque heure avec ses doigts.)*

Une . . . Deux.

*(Croyant marcher droit au lit de Malcome.)*

C'est l'instant de frapper.

*(Elle tire son poignard et se retire, toujours dormant, sous l'une des voûtes.)*



This is whatever one pleases, but it is certainly striking. And on the whole, barring the forced parricide *motif*, I consider *Macbeth* the best of these plays, the most faithful to the original and the version in which Ducis' variations have the most plausibility.

## V

This is quite relative praise and therefore not excessive. It would be difficult to say anything at all in favor of the last two dramas, which are the least important of the lot, judged even by contemporary criticism. The perversions in *Othello* are as great as the perversions in *Hamlet*; and if *King John* is not among Shakespeare's best, *Jean Sans-Terre ou la mort d'Arthur* (1791)<sup>1</sup> is surely Ducis' worst.

The subject of this play is more narrowly limited and the list of personages more curtailed than in any yet considered. It is Arthur's story, nothing more.<sup>2</sup> None of the French characters, nothing about a war, no Eleanor, no English earls. For most people, Falconbridge, the bold bastard, is the hero of *King John*: there is no Falconbridge in *Jean Sans-Terre*. There are only three acts, in which respect it is unique among the Shakespearean dramas of Ducis. The scene, with an effect of much cramping, passes entirely in the Tower of London. Ducis states<sup>3</sup> that he took the Hubert-Arthur episode from Shakespeare and implies, quite truthfully, that the rest is a poor thing, but his own. Three hundred lines of the original are expanded into three acts. There is an ancient Briton by the name of Kermadeuc, who takes the stock part of loyal retainer. There is a Constance who flits around disguised. There is a cowardly Hubert, who promises to save the prince, who lets his eyes be put out notwithstanding, and who laments and makes long speeches afterward. As to the death of Arthur, Ducis preferred to stick to a shady sort of history and make John kill him. He also makes John kill Constance, both events occurring comfortably off the stage. John himself, being as bad as ever, represents the one saving virtue in the play.

<sup>1</sup> II, 97-161.

<sup>2</sup> Compare the popularity of the "Enfants d'Edouard" subject, in Delavigne and the Romantic painters.

<sup>3</sup> *Avertissement*, II, 93-94.

*Othello ou le More de Venise* (1792) ends the attempts of Ducis.<sup>1</sup> Talma played the title-rôle with great applause. The scene passes entirely in Venice, but in three different places. There are seven personages, not including Shakespeare's blackamoor. "As to the color of Othello," says Ducis, "I thought I might dispense with giving him a black visage. . . . I thought that the yellow coppery tint would have the advantage of not revolting the eye of the public, and especially that of the women."<sup>2</sup> Iago too—styled Pézare—requires many *ménagements* not to be "revolting," requires in particular to be "carefully hidden" from the eyes of the spectators. For the English, says Ducis, might be able to stand such a monster as the original Iago; but the French could scarcely put up with his presence, still less with the development of his depths of villany:

C'est ce qui m'a engagé à ne faire connaître le personnage qui le remplace si faiblement dans ma pièce, que tout à la fin du dénouement. . . . Je me suis bien gardé de le faire paraître du moment qu'il est connu, du moment que j'ai révélé au public le secret affreux de son caractère.

Then the author adds that in a "court récit" we are instructed as to Pézare's death-penalty. Another reason for thus removing the criminal from the public gaze is that if this perfidy were known during the action the horror of the audience would have surpassed its interest in the love-story.

If Pézare is mild, Hédelmone is milder. She is more like Zaïre than Desdemona. She has the former's hesitation when all is ready for her wedding, she is involved in a similar "mistake" over a letter. She shows fright and weakness of a languishing order and little individuality. Hédelmonde or Helmonde, it is much the same thing.

There are again two *dénouements*. They were necessary, said Ducis, since an author's principal aim is to please and to suit the character of his nation.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, although he thought it more artistic and even more moral to end a tragedy tragically, although his original version allows that Othello shall stab Desdemona and himself, there is once more an optimistic variant in which Pézare's

<sup>1</sup> II, 175-272.

<sup>2</sup> *Avertissement*, II, 167-69.

<sup>3</sup> So he roundly states in the *Avertissement*, II, 171.

villany is discovered in time. A crowd enters as the poniard is raised, the lovers embrace, etc. "Les directeurs des théâtres seront les maîtres de choisir."

The original ending made a "terrible" impression.<sup>1</sup> The audience rose as one man and several women fainted.<sup>2</sup> The famous "oreiller," the infamous "mouchoir" are gently replaced by the devices of a poniard and a letter of *double entente* which Pézare foists on Lorédan-Cassio. Pézare is himself in love with Hédelmone and is responsible for an attempted *enlèvement* which he also attributes to Lorédan.

Othello is not concerned with any elopement. His marriage does not occur until the fourth act; like the coronation in *Hamlet*, it is obviously used to hold the strings together. The Cassio machinery is kept, but it is badly handled. Fearing for her father's life, Hédelmone asks succor and support from Lorédan, a "jeune inconnu." They become friends with startling rapidity, quite startling enough to give Othello just cause for suspicion. Lorédan begins by asking to be admitted into the Moor's service. He ends by actually making love to Hédelmone, a thing which the real Cassio never thought of doing. The old father—Ducis could not spare us him—tries to promote the union of his daughter with Lorédan. Then Hédelmone, to save the old father from punishment by the state, stoops to trickery and gives Lorédan a *bandeau* (sc. "mouchoir") from her brow together with a compromising note in which she is pledged to him. This note is meant to operate on *his* father, but Iago gains possession of it and "all is discovered."

But the note is too feeble, for it is clearly a mere trick; Othello is too feeble, for he rushes, like Orosmane, from great calm to great anger; Hédelmone trembles more than she loves; and the whole system of "préparations" is feeblest of all. For instance, a senator naïvely introduces Pézare's first  *récit*  by saying: "C'est à vous de conter." Hédelmone's father prophesies lumberingly: "Tu seras malheureuse," etc. There are the familiar banalities and periphrases. Some one speaks of spies as

Ces mortels dont l'état gage la vigilance.

<sup>1</sup> II, 169.

<sup>2</sup> It is true that Hédelmone dies a bloody death on the stage. This was not strictly forbidden to neo-classicism: it was only debatable land, and there are precedents in Voltaire

Othello thus moralizes over Hédelmone's body: "I would never have thought that such brazenness could be found in such youth. It is the effect of the climate."

Shakespeare's suggestion of a willow-song delighted Ducis, who wrote a lengthy version of it with the refrain

Chantez le saule et sa douce verdure.

The effect of these pentameters is not happy.

Ducis had observed, in 1792, that "la tragédie court les rues," and faint echoes of the Revolution are heard on his stage. There are such sounding couplets as these:

L'amour, fier de ses droits, comme la liberté,  
Rend l'homme à la nature, à son égalité.

We have much information about these abstracts, especially about "nature" (it is really time to find out what this Protean word has meant in France), and we have something about self-made men—Othello himself, like Roméo, being a "soldat parvenu."

But in spite of its date and these details, the play is obviously as neo-classic, the audience as refined as ever. "Never was anything seen so gentle, so attenuated, so delicate and so polished," says M. Jusserand emphatically;<sup>1</sup> and Ducis' melodramatic pill remained coated with respectability and vagueness. Impatiently did the clear-sighted *Correspondance littéraire* point out that "les petites mœurs" barred appreciation of energetic crimes and strong characters. Not yet was the pit flooded by the equally impossible Incroyables, so bitterly complained of by La Harpe, de Bray, and others. The theater was the last stronghold of the red heels against the red bonnets.

## VI

It is evident that Ducis was no lonely artist-peak overtopping his generation; his lack of uniqueness will appear all the more clearly if we glance at certain of his dramatic congeners in the art of adapting Shakespeare. Still in connection with the "patriotic tragedy," for which his voice was strongly uplifted, M.-J. Chénier

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 429.

has left two political plays on the Anglo-Roman model.<sup>1</sup> The first-written of these is *Brutus et Cassius ou les derniers Romains* (1786). It is just such a subject as the Revolutionary generation delighted in; and the handling is much closer to Voltaire than to Shakespeare. In fact Chénier, concerning the Englishman's *Julius Caesar*, has several contemptuous remarks to make. He is displeased with the low expressions, such as an "itching palm," and Shakespeare's popular appeal quite offends him. For the rest, the connection between the two plays consists mainly in the fact that both are based on the quarrel between Brutus and Cassius. Chénier's piece has but three acts, all of which pass in Brutus' tent at Philippi. He is discovered musing on Caesar's ghost, which has already appeared. He receives the news of Portia's death with more words than become a Stoic, and Cassius finds him in a reverie. They discuss the ghost a little and then pass immediately to their dispute which begins, as in Shakespeare, by the question of condoning corruption. It is not dramatically handled. The great quarrel between great friends is turned into what is scarcely more than an argument with recriminations, fading vaguely away as the other Romans enter.

The rest of this drama does not particularly concern us. Marie-Joseph uses a Shakespearean stepping-stone occasionally but not enough to carry him very far. Such are the presage of the two eagles and Cato's name as the first suggestion of the suicides. Some of the minor characters are also repeated. Otherwise about all that remains is the fact that Brutus and Cassius fight, lose, and are killed—but remember that the action stays in Brutus' tent. The drama contains a great deal of political discussion, which probably helped it at the time and now makes it only a poor performance. Chénier's theories were revolutionary not only anent government but in stage-craft. Yet when it came to the touch, he proved, like certain socialist statesmen, quite docile in practice.

*Henri VIII* (1791) is styled by Janin "un gascon de tragédie."<sup>2</sup> It presents no Katherine, no Wolsey, no pageant—the elements which alone save the original. The cycle of Henry's wives is moved

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres*, 10 vols., Paris, Guillaume, 1826: Vol. VI, 199–245; Vol. II, 3–74.

<sup>2</sup> Janin, "La Naissance du drame en France—Influence de Shakespeare," in *Critique dramatique*, Paris, 1878, III, pp. 15–52.

up just one point. The characters are thoroughly softened. Jane Seymour, Anne Bullen are both made impossibly "noble" and even moral. Cranmer's opportunism and shiftiness are obliterated and he becomes simply a holy prelate. Henry himself does not order his progressive harem in the traditional large manner. He is less of a giant and more of a villain, frequently discomposed and disconcerted. The speeches are throughout forced into the service of Revolutionary propaganda: such words as freedom, tyranny, justice, *égalité* are much bandied about. It is perhaps worth mentioning that after dwelling in *Henri VIII* on the wrongs of hapless queens, Chénier, the morning after its representation, attended the execution of Marie Antoinette.

There is a certain *Cléopâtre* by Marmontel, which although scantily acted in 1750, comes down to us as finally arranged in 1784.<sup>1</sup> Marmontel did not acknowledge this as an imitation of Shakespeare; and indeed the trail of Dryden seems over it all; but whether version or perversion, there is naturally a Shakespearean *fonds* to such a subject. The play has fewer ups and downs in the neo-classical handling, since it begins only after the battle of Actium. The unity of place is preserved—everything passes in Cléopâtre's palace at Alexandria. The unity of time is slightly relaxed.

Cléopâtre considers sacrificing herself in order to obtain peace; and when her rival—in a scene between the two which Shakespeare did not attempt—when Octavia pleads for peace, Cléopâtre generously wishes to cede her lover and her happiness. Antony wonders at her nobility and asks where is her love. It is revealed, when she suddenly changes front, as she does several times with unreal effect. After bidding him fight to the last, after setting out to flatter and placate Octave, she recurs at the last to the idea of sacrifice. It is with this idea rather than from despair of a possible ultimate happiness that she kills herself. Neither she nor Antony ever show the instinctive jealousy which serves to add nature's touches to the original. They are too noble for that.

Antony is truly noble, for instead of reviling Cléopâtre after his defeat, he accuses only himself. In a singular scene with his rejected

<sup>1</sup> Marmontel, *Œuvres*, 7 vols., Paris: Belin, 1819-20: Vol. V, II<sup>e</sup> Partie, pp. 387-428.

wife (not according to Shakespeare) he admits his fault, but stiffens with pride when she speaks of rescuing him from the dangerous charm. He says that she is only a tool in the hands of the cunning Octave—who is forced into the part of vindictive villain. The lovers are never allowed their few moments of exultant victory, which Shakespeare used for contrast.

No one supposes Marmontel to be a great or even a good dramatist, but he seems, in a certain elevation and harmony of style, to be at least equal to Ducis. The respectable neo-classic effect is still there, without melodrama.

Of the same year, there is a *Coriolan* by La Harpe,<sup>1</sup> which, it has been suggested, may present another facet of the gallicized Shakespeare. But La Harpe emphatically disclaims that origin, Janin supports his disclaimer, and after comparing the two plays, I am disposed to think that their similarities are due to the fact that they use Plutarch as a common source.<sup>2</sup> Besides there were no less than eight French *Coriolans* represented between 1607 and 1784. La Harpe violates the unities, but rather in the name of Houdar de la Motte than of Shakespeare.

Some of the smaller fry also deserve a passing word. Editions of these are not readily attainable and I can only speak of them at second hand. Some rather curious facts are reported.<sup>3</sup>

Sébastien Mercier, another daring theorist, has three quite conventional versions. In *Les Tombeaux de Vérone*, he uses prose, but it is a noble periphrastic prose, full of *récits* and monologues. Juliette has a confidante, words replace action, and the lovers' woes have a happy ending—for the heroine awakens at the moment of a general killing which is thereby turned into a general embracing. In *Le Vieillard et ses trois filles*, Mercier presents a Lear who is not a king at all but a private citizen. Diderot supersedes Shakespeare. The author boasts that it is a "tableau moral," a lesson to ungrateful children. Finally, his *Timon d'Athènes* is said to be nearer the spirit of the original. Written in prison during the Reign of Terror, such

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres*, 16 vols., Paris, Verdière, 1820: vol. II, 451-526.

<sup>2</sup> La Harpe, II, 467 (*Préface*); Janin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Especially by Jusserand, pp. 405 ff., 439-40. He thus summarizes the more obscure adaptors (whom Janin calls "maître-mosaïstes"): "They all surprised the public then by their rashness, and surprise us now by their timidity."

a subject may well have interested Mercier. But apparently he handles it without fire.

*Hilas et Silvie*, by Rochon de Chabannes, is described by Jusserand as a musical-pastoral adapted from *The Tempest*. Caliban remains; the rest shows the influence of Dryden. The comedies generally were clearly less appreciated than the tragedies and histories. When adapted at all, they were very roughly handled. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, more popular than most, was remodeled, for instance, by Collot d'Herbois under the title of the *Amant loup-garou*. This was merely a vulgar farce, as was also, according to La Harpe, De Rozoi's *Rhapsodie de Richard III*.

There remain two versions of *Othello* and two of *Romeo and Juliette*—after which this painful subject of travesties may well be dismissed. *Le More de Venise* by Douin (an army-captain) evinces a military frankness. The author cannot stand Shakespeare's low comedy and has remedied "that essential fault." Like Boileau, he admits only a pagan mythology and wants no such terms as "heaven," "angel," "devil." Like Ducis, he held that Othello's skin and Iago's soul both required whitening. The whole action passes at Cyprus. Douin's main compromise is in allowing Desdemona to be stabbed on the stage. Rodrigo perishes otherwise: Cassio "charge Rodrigue qui tombe dans la coulisse—mais de façon à être vu."

Butini, another obscure character, has an *Othello* whitened, softened, and simplified, according to the canon. The Moor does not kill his wife—"il la frappe." Butini says modestly of his collaboration: "Si cette pièce peut ne pas déplaire aux véritables hommes de goût . . . la gloire en sera dûe principalement à Shakespeare."

Mention has already been made of Chastellux' *Roméo et Juliette*. It was performed privately at La Chevrette in 1770 and was quite an event. According to the author he "left out all that is comic" and according to Jusserand all that is tragic, "for the Chevalier's play ends as merrily as possible." The rendering by Moline and Cubières (1806) shows the veering of the wind. Cubières had represented, in 1776, a take-off on the "sombre" play called *La manie des drames sombres*, in which he ridicules Shakespeare, Young, and English melancholy in general. But this *Roméo et Juliette*, *tragédie lyrique*,



not only has a mournful catastrophe, but reveals the contortions of the poisoned Roméo, furnishes a background of cypresses, and changes all merry meetings to lugubrious marches.

I shall not dwell upon *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* reduced to the level of ballets, pantomimes, and "spectacles à cirque." Passing over the excesses of the Revolution and the stagnation of the Empire, it may be well to repeat here that Shakespeare really reached France only in the days of the Romanticists. As early as 1827 Soulié achieved a not unmerited success with his more reverent version of *Roméo et Juliette*—by far the most popular subject of all in France: when Vigny followed two years later with his admirable *Othello*, then Hugo's propaganda and English acting had won their cause and an approximate Shakespeare was first made possible on the French stage. But it would take us too far afield to show just how the new order succeeded: I return to our Ducis, after subjoining here a list of the more or less Shakespearean plays analyzed or mentioned above. The date given is usually that of the first representation.

- 1732. Voltaire, *Zaïre*.
- 1733. Voltaire, *La Mort de César* (private); 1743 (public).
- 1769. Ducis, *Hamlet*.  
Chabannes, *Hilas et Silvie*.
- 1770. Chastellux, *Roméo et Juliette* (private).
- 1772. Ducis, *Roméo et Juliette*.
- 1773. Douin, *Le More de Venise*.
- 1780. Collot d'Herbois, *Amant loup-garou*.
- 1782. De Rozoi, *Richard III*.  
Mercier, *Les Tombeaux de Vérone*.
- 1783. Ducis, *Le Roi Léar*.
- 1784. Marmontel, *Cléopâtre* (reprise).  
Ducis, *Macbeth* (reprise "avec changements," 1790).  
La Harpe, *Coriolan*.
- 1785. Butini, *Othello*.
- 1786. M.-J. Chénier, *Brutus et Cassius*.
- 1791. Ducis, *Jean Sans-Terre*.  
M.-J. Chénier, *Henri VIII*.
- 1792. Ducis, *Othello*.  
Mercier, *Le Vieillard et ses trois filles*.
- 1794. Mercier, *Timon d'Athènes*.
- 1806. Moline and Cubières, *Roméo et Juliette*.
- 1816. Lemer cier, *Le Frère et la sœur jumeaux*.

1827. Soulié, *Roméo et Juliette*.  
 1828. De Vigny, *Shylock* (never acted).  
 1829. De Vigny, *Othello*.  
 1833. Delavigne, *Les Enfants d'Édouard*.

## VII

Tu conçois, cher Lénnox, qu'en mes tristes récits  
 Des tableaux si cruels doivent être adoucis.

These words of Edgard to his brother<sup>1</sup> are a fitting expression of Ducis' dramatic ideal. It has been sufficiently shown, I hope, how Shakespeare was travestied and travestied according to pretty definite principles and demands. It seems also to be probable that the contrast between the original and the shadow was more pronounced at this time than it would have been either at the time of Corneille or of the younger Voltaire. And I submit as concluding thesis the opinion that Ducis represents the full artistic decadence of the neo-classic tragedy.

Crébillon, as Brunetière has argued, might seem more positively to be entitled to that bad eminence; but there is the chronological space between the two and the fact that this space was occupied by the tragedy, still languishing but still living, of Voltaire. Now Ducis adds to the decadent horrors of Crébillon the sentimentality of his time, the *naïveté* of his mind, and especially the Voltairian technique in a state of weak dilution.

To resume the more salient features of that technique in opposition to Shakespeare's: we have constantly rhetorical Alexandrines instead of blank verse or prose; conventional centering of action, though with some relaxation of the unities; conventionalized characters instead of profoundly psychological and individual protagonists; no subplot; no comic relief; a language that is smooth, not appropriate, tasteless epithets, commonplace generalizations; prosaic verse and monotonous rimes; a few characters instead of heterogeneous humanity, no realistic crowds, no turmoil of action; the latter replaced by profuse apostrophes, *récits*, monologues, and confidants; above all, happy endings, with repentance and forgiveness; in short, the appeal of a bastard *genre*, legitimized to suit the sensibilities of a lady-like audience.

<sup>1</sup> In *Le Roi Léar*, I, 344.

Ducis' environment of course is his main defense and the main reason for writing about him at all. His interest is purely historical. If it was possible for his tragedies to outlive their author,<sup>1</sup> if it was possible for even a publisher's puff to declare him "classé comme quatrième tragique entre les auteurs du premier ordre,"<sup>2</sup> there can be no doubt that he was essentially the man for his time. Personal merits he had none, or rather his merits were all personal and not in the least literary. Sainte-Beuve, with his usual generosity toward the lesser lights, holds that the harmony and simplicity of the "bon-homme's" character reflect on his work a certain originality, blurred for us by the preponderating bad taste of his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> Ducis' *cachet* is indeed from time to time discernible; but on the whole the personal characteristics that have appeared in his plays are not sufficiently momentous to make us waver in the conviction of his dramatic ineptitude. Whatever may have been his honorable qualities, his plays are decadent, his audience was effete, his Shakespeare was made in the image of a half-god—and Shakespeare "le lui a bien rendu."

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<sup>1</sup> They were played even under the Restoration (Jusserand, p. 438.)

<sup>2</sup> "Avis du librairie" to edition of *Œuvres*.

<sup>3</sup> *C. de L.*, VI, 458.